

SAN DIEGO COUNTY JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMISSION
POLINSKY CHILDREN'S CENTER INSPECTION REPORT
2007

Facility Name: POLINSKY CHILDREN'S
CENTER

Inspection Date: 12/14/07

Facility Capacity: 204

Last Inspection Date: 8/23/06

Superintendent: Cathi Palatella

Address: 9400 Ruffin Court
San Diego, CA 92123

Telephone Number: (858) 514-4601

Fax: (858) 514-4619

Type of Facility: Shelter Care

Presiding Juvenile Court Judge:
Honorable Susan Huguenor

Staff Interviewed: Tuan Pham
Greg Watson

Juvenile Justice Commission Chair: Steve Wiley

Commission Inspection Team:
Cynthia Burke
Andrea Dixon

Comments and Recommendations:

This Juvenile Justice Commission inspection report is for calendar year 2007. To compile this information, the inspection team met with Polinsky staff, conducted a tour, and also reviewed the FY 2007-2008 Business Plan for the facility that included historical statistics by fiscal year. The Polinsky Children's Center (PCC) is a 24-hour facility for the temporary emergency shelter of children who must be separated from their families for their own safety, or whose parents have neglected them, or cannot provide care due to incarceration. The focus of the program is short-term interim care for children in crisis. The County is to be commended for facilitating the creation of a public-private partnership that allows the Center to create the best environment possible for children who are removed from their homes.

Since the last inspection, the average length of stay at Polinsky has decreased from 19 days in FY 2005-2006 to 13 days in FY 2006-2007. Staff attributes this change to the new Assessment Center, where youth may remain up to 23 hours while staff work to find an appropriate placement in their home neighborhood, or with a relative. There is a significant trend toward maintaining youth in their neighborhoods.

In addition, a process for homework has been implemented in the past year. Youth can now obtain library cards and, in addition to the on-site library, a bookmobile comes to PCC twice a month. The Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning system (HVAC) is in the process of being updated as well.

Recommendations:

1. The regular Head Start program at PCC changed its focus, and now only provides home-based services in the community. This change is due to Head Start program requirement changes and a change in priorities of the Neighborhood House Association. In addition, fewer children under six years of age have been placed at PCC. PCC is encouraged to continue investigating options for replacement of Head Start services to PCC preschool-aged children. **UPDATE 8/6/08--** The Child Abuse Prevention Foundation (CAPF) has funded a part-time position for a preschool teacher to work in the Preschool Program in the Toddlers Cottage. The preschool teacher started at PCC on May 20, 2008. Her regular work hours during the school year are Monday through Friday, from 1 PM through 5 PM, and during the summer months starting in mid June, her work schedule is from 8 AM through 12 noon.

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2. PCC has a contract with the San Diego Unified School District and youth do have access to computers at school, however, Staff was unclear about the level of availability. PCC is encouraged to continue to work with the school staff to ensure that the computer resources are easily and readily available to all youth. **UPDATE 8/6/08:** As part of the educational services provided by the San Diego Unified School District to students in the PCC School, 15 wireless computer laptops are available for use by PCC resident students. These wireless laptops are operational in all classrooms and are used by students for various class projects. The Special Education Classroom also has 3 desktop computers for use by students with special needs in addition to the pool of laptops. All computers have content barrier filtering software to ensure the appropriate use of the equipment. There are additional desktop computers in the classrooms which are reserved for use by teachers and support staff to perform administrative duties.

AREA REVIEWED:		
R= Reviewed	NR=Not Reviewed	I= Interviewed
		NI – Not Interviewed
<u>QUALITY OF LIFE</u>	<u>PROGRAMS</u>	<u>PERSONS INTERVIEWED</u>
Physical Plant - R	Education - R	Minors - NI
Meals/Nutrition - R	Vocation/Employability - NR	Superintendent - NI
Mental Health - R	Community Services - NR	Medical/Psych. Staff - I
Physical/Dental Health - R	Victim/Gang Awareness - NR	School Staff - NI
Religious Services - R	Substance Abuse - NR	Supervisor - I
Volunteer Involvement - R		Supervisor Staff (Counselors) - I
Visiting - R		Food Services Staff - NI

GENERAL INFORMATION

Has the facility exceeded capacity since the last inspection?

No, the facility has not exceeded capacity since the last inspection. The licensed capacity for the facility was increased in FY 2005 to 204. In FY 2006, the average daily population for the year was 119 children (monthly range is 96 to 131). In FY 2007, the average daily population for the year was 66. These numbers continue a downward trend (in average daily population, as well as admissions) noted in the previous JCC inspection report. The average length of stay has decreased since FY 2006 (to 13 days, on average, in FY 2007).

Does the facility house minors under Section 601 Welfare & Institutions Code?

The focus of the Polinsky Children's Center is the short-term interim care for children in crisis. Children housed at Polinsky are dependents and not delinquents. In FY 2007, a total of 1,650 unduplicated children were served at Polinsky.

SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION INDICATE:

Number of Suicides: 0

Number of Attempted Suicides/Self-harming incidents: 23 unduplicated children

Number of Deaths from other causes: 0

Number of AWOLs: 144 unduplicated children

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Number of attempted AWOLs: 56 unduplicated children

LOCAL INSPECTIONS:

Fire Department: 6/28/2007

Medical/Mental Health: N/A

Department of Environmental Health: 3/19/2007

Nutritional Health: N/A

Community Care Licensing Inspection: 4/13/2007

Date of Last Fire Drill: 12/12/2007

Facility Safety and Security:

A computerized card system is utilized for most exterior and some interior doors. The primary entrance door is observed by a live person in the main public lobby. In addition, two security guards are on duty at all times. There is an Emergency Disaster Preparedness Plan consisting of a Site Emergency Response Plan and a Business Continuation Plan, both of which are updated periodically. Emergency food and supplies are maintained in locked storage at the rear of the facility. Fire drills are organized and conducted by the Recreation Coordinator and a log is maintained with the results.

SLEEPING ROOMS

Comments:

The campus includes six residential cottages and an infant nursery. Each room is equipped with beds or cribs, and older youth have ample furniture in which to keep their personal items. The rooms all had windows and it appeared that youth were encouraged to decorate to their personal taste. The condition of these rooms is described in a later section.

STAFFING

Staff to Child Ratio:

The FY 2006 budget for the facility includes 274 full-time-equivalent positions. The staff-to-child ratio varies by age group and complies with AB 1197 and Community Care Licensing (CCL) requirements. For babies (ages 0 to 2) and toddlers (ages 2 to 5) the ratio is 1:3, and for those 6 to 18 years of age, it is 1:6. As a residential facility, staff is on site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In addition, it should be noted that Enhanced Child Supervision provides additional supervision for those children who have special needs or whose behavior may place them at risk of harming themselves or others while at Polinsky.

Communication in language minor can understand?

The youth who are brought to the Polinsky Center in FY 2007 represented 14 ethnic/racial groups. It is estimated that, on an annual basis, approximately five percent of students are monolingual speakers who do not speak English. The PCC School has one Spanish-speaking teacher. There are also three teacher's aides who speak Tagalog or a dialect of Tagalog. In addition to the school staff, there are also PCC staff who are bilingual in Spanish and Tagalog and are available to assist in meeting the needs of the residents as appropriate. Interpreters are provided for hearing impaired.

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Diversity of Staff:

According to facility logs, the staff reflects the diversity of the children housed at the facility. This composition was evident during the tour.

Staff/Minor interactions:

Very little staff/minor interaction was observed. Those interactions that did occur, however, appeared to be appropriate, friendly and informal.

CONDITIONS OF GROUNDS

Lawns, playing fields, blacktop, asphalt and other:

The outdoor recreational activities were in very good condition. These areas include a playing field with artificial turf, as well as a playground with a play structure on an area with ground covering that offers children maximum protection as they play. The common area between the cottages is grassy and pleasant. Tables and benches are available for sitting and are often used for a weekly barbeque. There is a new toddler play area with new age-appropriate equipment. Because Polinsky is an open facility, it cannot be locked. However, staff is cognizant of the need to maintain the safety of its residences. Private security guards patrol the property and tall fences are also in place. The security system with digital recording capabilities has improved staffs' ability to observe activities in retrospect.

EXTERIOR OF BUILDINGS

General condition, paint, roof, drains/gutters and etc.:

The Administration Building, as well as each of the cottages, appeared to be in excellent condition.

INTERIOR OF BUILDINGS

Walls, paint, floors, drains, plumbing fixtures, air vents, windows, etc.:

The interiors of the buildings were also well-maintained and were very pleasant in appearance. The current ventilation system, which was remarked upon in the prior report, is in the process of being serviced, which should resolve the poor air circulation reported in certain areas of the facility.

Are cleaning fluids and chemicals labeled and safely stored?

These supplies are maintained in a locked and vented locker in the rear of the facility.

Weapons Locker location:

N/A.

Recreation/Sports Equipment:

As previously noted, the playing field and outdoor play equipment were in good condition, as was a new toddler play area. In addition, the Community Center, which includes a full-sized indoor basketball court, hobby and crafts room, locker rooms, and showers, was also well maintained. In the past year, PCC received a donation from the Rivkin Foundation and the Child Abuse Prevention Foundation, which

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equipped the Community Center with a new, large screen and sound system to be used for movies and sports events. PCC has replaced the floor of the Community Center with a more durable material.

Are the hallways clear and doors propped open?

Yes, the halls of the buildings that the Commissioners toured were clear and doors were propped open.

Court Holding area:

There is no court holding area. However, the admission area was clean, friendly, and welcoming to children entering the center. It included a number of age-appropriate toys for the youth, and staff had the ability to constantly watch the youth.

Sleeping rooms/dormitories:

Six home-like residences are currently part of the Polinsky Center. Each self-contained cottage, which is 5,869 square-feet, includes 13 separate bedrooms, a day room, dining room, kitchen, and outdoor barbeque area. Youth are assigned to a cottage based on age, maturity, sex, and individual treatment needs. While each cottage has adopted its own "culture," youth from different cottages have the opportunity to interact at meal-time, in school, during recreational activities, and on field-trips.

Beds:

Serenity Cottage included sturdy cribs for the younger children. A room with a double bed and crib was also available for teenage mothers at the center. The other cottages for older youth had twin beds which were not on the floor.

Art, books, personal possessions allowed in sleeping rooms?

Yes, personal possessions are allowed in the sleeping rooms.

Graffiti present?

No graffiti was discovered as part of the tour of the facility.

Ample blankets?

Yes, there are ample blankets for the youth.

Study Area:

Each of the cottages includes a study area for the youth.

Adequate Lighting?

Yes, both the common areas of the cottages and the individual rooms appeared to have adequate lighting. All of the cottages and Serenity House had numerous windows, and some had sky lights, which provided more than adequate natural lighting as well.

Temperature:

The temperatures in the buildings that were toured felt comfortable. However, as noted, the repairs to the aging ventilation system have increased and improved circulation, which has been a problem in the past.
UPDATE 8/6/08: Department of General Services has initiated the on-going replacement plan for the

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Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system at PCC since July 1, 2006. The following phases have been completed: (1) replacement of two HVAC units in the back modular office building (Mental Health/EPSDT); (2) replacement of one HVAC unit in Building B (Administration); replacement of two HVAC units in building M (Cafeteria); and replacement of thermostat control in Cottage H (Teen Boys).

ORIENTATION OF MINORS

Are minors oriented to rules and procedures?

When a child enters PCC, he or she completes an intake program to gather information about his/her background and needs. This is the responsibility of the Intake Social Worker, assisted by the Residential Care Workers in the cottages.

Are rules and grievance procedures posted?

Rules and procedures are posted in the cottages, as well as additional locations, such as the dining hall.

Are rules and grievance procedures understood by minors?

No youth were interviewed as part of this inspection, but according to staff, minors are clear on policies and procedures.

Minors Interviewed – Comments

NA

MEALS/NUTRITION

Kitchen – Clean; are knives and chemicals locked?

The main kitchen facility was toured as part of this inspection. The kitchen was very clean and knives as well as chemicals were locked.

Have the youths working in the kitchen been trained?

No youth work in the kitchen - all staffs are contracted with through a private vendor.

Are meals served or cafeteria style?

The main dining room can serve up to 98 youth at one time. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served cafeteria style or can be delivered to the cottages. In addition to these three meals, three snacks are served daily and youth are also able to order additional food items from the kitchen. Each cottage has its own supply of snacks.

Are minors permitted to converse during meals?

Yes - staff strives to create as comfortable and natural environment as possible.

Is Staff present and supervising?

Yes, both contractual food service staff and Polinsky staff are present at meal time.

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Is weekly menu prepared? Is it posted?

Yes. A copy of the menu was posted in the kitchen area.

Are servings ample, nutritious and appetizing?

A professional chef supervises the PCC meal program. This staffing change has been well-received as the quality of the meals has drastically increased for an institutional setting. Youth are allowed to have as much food as they desire.

Length of time allowed for eating?

Twenty to thirty minutes. Meals are served in the dining hall or the cottage.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE OF MINORS

Appearance?

Children observed as part of the inspection were clean, properly dressed, and engaged in appropriate activities.

Showers – Frequency? Privacy maintained? Supervised by Staff? Any assaults in showers?

Babies receive baths twice a day. Toddlers receive a bath or shower before bedtime each day. Youth who are 6 -18 years old shower in the morning before school and before bedtime every day. Youth with special needs shower as needed throughout the day. Privacy is maintained by gender and under close supervision by Cottage staff. Showers and baths are scheduled for each youth separately one at a time in their own cottages as there is no communal shower or bath. With staff standing outside of the bathroom supervising each youth taking a shower/bath alone, the bathroom can only be occupied by one youth at a time.

Condition of clothing – Does clothing fit? Is it appropriate to weather?

Clothing appeared to be the child's regular clothes. Appropriate in all respects.

PROGRAMS

Recreation/Exercise – types and amount each day.

The recreation program, in collaboration with volunteers and donors, provides daily recreational activities that complement each child's educational, physical, and social development while at Polinsky. In addition to facility-wide programs, cottage-specific recreation is also provided that includes art, crafts, games, sports, socials, and pizza parties. Cottage residential care workers are crucial to the programs. In addition, the program has been expanded to increase community outings, and to include younger children; two after-school activity leaders and a music instructor have been hired; and an after-school art program has been implemented.

In addition, health and fitness classes have been added on weekends, and a walking program that includes youth setting and meeting individual goals has been implemented for youth interested in health and fitness.

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Access to Religious Services?

Religious services are held onsite at PCC every Sunday for youth 12 and older, who wish to participate voluntarily. Any youth under 12 can attend on-site or off-site religious services with prior parental consent.

Volunteer Program:

The Volunteer Program promotes community involvement by volunteers that enables PCC to provide a wide array of activities and events and individual tutoring, teaching, and nurturing that could not be provided by paid staff. LiveScan background clearance procedures help reduce volunteers' processing time from weeks to days. In FY 2007, volunteers worked almost 8,000 hours at the facility.

Counseling and Casework:

As described in the mental health section, most youth receive day rehabilitation services, while others with greater levels of need, also may receive more intensive services from Juvenile Forensic staff.

Family Reunification Planning:

Polinsky is a short-term placement option. A youth's case worker continues to work with him/her during the stay to facilitate transfer to a more permanent setting.

Substance Abuse Counseling:

Education is provided through regular curriculum and guest speakers, and a NA group is also in place.

Victim Awareness Classes:

The Sexual Treatment Education Program and Services (STEPS) program was implemented in January 1999 to provide individual and group therapy to children, ages 5 to 12 years, who are acting out sexually due to a prior history of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or other maltreatment. This program is a public-private collaboration, contracted through Mental Health Services, Inc.

Gang Awareness Classes:

N/A.

Sexual Harassment Classes:

Yes – provided as part of day rehabilitation.

Parenting Classes:

Yes – provided as part of day rehabilitation.

Vocational Classes:

Independent Living Skills classes are provided every Wednesday onsite and offsite for youth 15 - 18+ years old. Youth Empowerment Services are provided every Friday to this age group to assist them with résumé writing, computerized employment preparation and job search.

Community Service:

PCC residents do participate in community service.

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Youth-to-Youth Program:

Another recently implemented program worth noting is the Youth-to-Youth program. The purpose of this program is to address the needs of current foster youth and to assist them in developing goals and skills that will help them succeed after foster care. The program is designed to benefit both dependent and emancipated foster youth by providing mentorship to motivate youth to continue their education, promote active participation in the Independent Living Skills programs, and to help all former foster youth obtain work experience.

DISCIPLINE OF MINORS

Frequency and type:

While there may be consequences for maladaptive behavior, staff focuses on encouraging positive behaviors at Polinsky. PATA (Polinsky Active Teaching Approach) is the center of the disciplinary procedures at PCC. It is a point system where the children earn points, both negative and positive. They earn privileges based on the number of points earned. It should be noted that no physical discipline is utilized.

TELEPHONE

Access:

There are centralized phones in staff offices and common areas in all cottages which are available for use by youth upon request. Staff dials the phone numbers for the youth each time a youth needs to make a phone call. For youth with court-ordered contact restrictions specified by Social Workers, PCC staff will monitor the phone conversations as required.

CORRESPONDENCE

Is Postage Free? Is incoming and/or outgoing mail read? Is there confidential correspondence?

Postage is provided by PCC for letters being sent by residents. Incoming and outgoing mail is never read by PCC staff. All incoming and outgoing mail to PCC residents are routed through the youth's Social Worker in Child Welfare Services (CWS) outside of PCC. CWS Social Workers read incoming and outgoing mail of youth due to court-ordered contact restrictions.

VISITING

Is there adequate space, convenient times or accommodations to parent work schedule, etc. special visits?

Parents/guardians of youth at Polinsky are allowed to have either supervised or unsupervised visits with their children. The individual social worker determines who may visit, and restrictions, if any, that may apply. The family visitation areas (both indoor and an outdoor patio) were recently renovated. Both include comfortable furniture, as well as toys for the children.

Do staff supervise visits?

Yes, if the visit is specified as only occurring if supervised.

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Is there adequate privacy during visits?

If a family member can have an unsupervised visit with a child, a room with a door is available.

Have all minors had visits?

Not all parents/guardians are allowed to have visits with the children at the facility. The safety of the child is staffs' primary concern.

SCHOOL

Teachers – Number of full-time; frequency of substitutions.

There are currently seven teachers, as well as assistants and other support staff (e.g., school nurse, mental health, rehabilitation). A number of well-trained substitutes are on call.

Number of minors in school/per classroom.

The coordination of education responsibilities was recently assumed by the San Diego City Schools. There are seven classrooms that can accommodate 15 students each in a full-day program that is operated on a year-round basis. All minors between the ages of 6 and 18 are required to attend school. Staff is investigating options to replace the Head Start program for preschool-aged children.

Number of Minors on independent study:

All of the youth attend school in the classroom setting. However, in some cases, arrangements may be made to continue the child on with his most recent school.

Atmosphere of classroom:

A number of learning opportunities clean.

Adequate Supplies? Books, paper, computers, etc.

School staff noted they feel very fortunate in terms of the level of supplies they have. An additional resource for the students is the PCC Library located next to the school, which provides multi-cultural books and videos for children and/or staff to check-out.

Activities and coursework:

Activities and class work are designed so that a student can enter at any time and begin to continue his/her learning experience.

Are minors required to do homework?

Yes. In the past year, school staff have developed a homework program.

Number of minors not attending. Reason?

All minors should attend. The exception is those who chose to and are able to continue to go to their last regular school.

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Relationship between the School and PCC staff.

The staff work closely together to ensure there is an adequate flow of information.

Describe access to school, recreation, and exercise for minors confined to their rooms:

No youth are confined to their rooms at Polinsky.

MEDICAL/MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Health Services Program at Polinsky ensures that all children receive a thorough medical assessment at the time of entry and that their health and well-being is taken care of while in residence. Currently, medical services are provided through a contractual agreement with Rady Children's Hospital and Health Center. The Juvenile Forensics Services' Mental Health Services Program ensures that those children with serious psychiatric and psychological disturbances are identified and provided with appropriate care while at PCC. Additionally, the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) program provides mental health services while offering life skills training to high-risk children. On-going assessments (medical and psychosocial) are provided to ensure that children receive appropriate care and treatment.

/end